


STOR

WARRIOR ASCETICS IN INDIAN HISTORY*

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Warrior ascetics first arose in India some time after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. The earlier existence of violent conflict between kings and temples is documented for Kashmir in the *Rājataraṅgini*. The basis of this conflict was in large measure economic. Under Muslim rule this economic conflict continued but was also given religious sanction. This seems to have altered the situation sufficiently to provoke the creation of military orders of ascetics. Even so, these orders became politically significant only after the collapse of the Mughal Empire, and more particularly after British activities created political and economic chaos in the second half of the eighteenth century. One result of this chaotic situation was the so-called Sannyasi Rebellion, a complex phenomenon whose main participants were in fact Muslim fakirs. After the consolidation of British rule no scope remained for the different groups of warrior ascetics and they rapidly declined in importance.

Never have I seen such yogīs, Brother.
They wander mindless and negligent
Proclaiming the way of Mahādeva.
For this they are called great *mahants*.
To markets and bazaars they bring their meditation,
False *siddhas*, lovers of *māyā*.
  When did Dattatreya attack a fort?
  When did Śukadeva join with gunners?
  When did Nārada fire a musket?
  When did Vyāsadeva sound a battle cry?
These make war, slow-witted.
Are they ascetics or archers?
Become unattached, greed is their mind's resolve.
Wearing gold they shame their profession,
Collecting stallions and mares and
Acquiring villages they go about as tax collectors.[1]

THIS SONG FROM THE *Bījak* of Kabīr registers an attack against the bands of warrior ascetics or monks who became a significant political and military presence in North India from about the fifteenth century until the early decades of the nineteenth. Their heyday was the latter half of the eighteenth century when the so-called Sannyāsī Rebellion, later immortalized by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in *Anandamath* and other novels, for a time threatened the hegemony of the British in Bengal. Although the rebellion did not survive the consolidation of British control in the suceeding epoch, it later became a potent rallying symbol for Hindu nationalists, thanks largely to Bankim's writings.

Even since independence the political significance, and even active participation of the military orders has not been entirely negligible. When, for instance, in the year 1967 over two-hundred thousand Hindu priests and ascetics gathered in Delhi to participate in sometimes violent demonstrations against legislation permitting cow slaughter, these demonstrations provoked inevitable comparisons with the Sannyāsī Rebellion while many of the sannyāsīs who took part were members of para-military groups or "regiments" (*akhāṛās*) originally founded by medieval warrior monks.[2] These same akhāṛās also played a disastrous role in the tragic Kumbha Melā

* I would like to thank the many colleagues who have offered suggestions and criticisms in the progressive elaboration of this paper, especially Professors A. L. Basham, Bruce Flood, Kenneth R. Hoover, K. C. Panchanadikar, and Thomas R. Trautmann. Part of the research was done with the aid of a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies.

[1] Kabīradāsa, *Kabīra-bījaka*, ed. Śukadeva Simha (Allahabad: Nīlābha Prakāśana, 1972), p. 103 (*ramainī* no. 69). The rendering of *Karoṛa* as "tax collectors" is permissible according to Platts' dictionary and preferible in sense to the usual "millionaires." Although the song is attributed to Kabīr, the prominent mention of firearms makes it likely that it was written considerably after the battle of Panipat (1526) when these weapons were first used on a large scale on Indian soil.

[2] See Khushwant Singh, "In Search of the Seekers of Truth," *The New York Times Magazine* (January 8, 1967).

riots of 1956, though in this case without any directly political motives being involved.[3]

The small critical literature on the participation of such religious groups in the military and political affairs of pre-modern India is generally marred by either nationalist or colonialist bias and fails to discuss the relation of the groups to their social and political context. The few modern studies worth special mention include a series of pioneering articles by the missionary scholars J. N. Farquhar and W. G. Orr;[4] a detailed descriptive history of the warrior monks of Dasnāmī orders by the medieval historian Jadunath Sarkar;[5] and two works on the Sannyāsī Rebellion by the Bengali magistrate J. M. Ghosh.[6] More recently the sociologist G. S. Ghurye has made a useful survey of the whole subject in his study of Indian sādhus.[7]

Somewhat in a class apart is the brief sociological analysis of these ascetics found in Max Weber's seminal study of Hinduism first published in 1921. Weber does not cite his sources but they cannot have included any of the basic secondary ones just mentioned, all of which were published at a later date. Despite the inadequate information at his disposal his comments merit repeating as a starting point for a more extensive analysis:

> The mendicants and ascetics of the neo-Hindu religions have also displayed that phenomenon found in Asia, particularly among the Japanese Buddhists, most extensively, however, among the Islamic Dervishes—the monastic conflict of belief, a product of sect competition and of the foreign dominions of Islam and then the English. A great number of Hindu sects develop the Naga type of outright weaponed propaganda of their ideas under the strict control of an ascetic *guru* or *gosain*. In caste affiliation they were rather "democratic," however, some . . . were exclusively restricted to the "twice-born" castes. They have made the role of the English difficult, but also have fought each other in bloody feuds . . . . In part they developed into robber bands, living by the contributions of the people, or into soldiers of fortune. The most significant example of this development of orders of propaganda fighters were the Sikhs . . ., which for a time until the defeat of 1845, retained sovereignty over the Punjab, having established there a kind of pure warrior state.[8]

The present article is thematically divided in four sections. The first suggests a simple dual classification of movements of warrior ascetics based on their socio-economic and political motivations. The second offers some observations about the extent and politico-economic base of religious conflict in ancient India with particular attention to the history of Kashmir as recorded in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. The third section reviews the general history of militaristic religious movements in medieval India, relating them, when possible, to the dual classification proposed in the first section. The final section attempts to analyze in more detail the complex history and changing character of the best documented of such movements, the so-called Sannyasi Rebellion of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Although the published source materials used in preparing this article are adequate to attempt a fresh discussion of the subject, there is still need of new basic research in India. How much new material might be uncovered is uncertain, but a possible place to begin would be in the archives, if such exist, of monasteries which at one time employed warrior monks. Also useful might be the Muslim hagiographic literature written in Persian, still only partially explored, and the material in state archives, principally those of West Bengal, on the activities of trader-monks such as Purangiri.

Types of Warrior Ascetic Movements

Most new religious movements within or without an established church or sect have historically stemmed from situations of acute

[3] See V. Mehta, *Portrait of India* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 86-133.

[4] J. N. Farquhar, "The Organization of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1925, pp. 479-86); the same author's "The Fighting Ascetics of India," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, IX (1925), 431-52; and W. G. Orr, "Armed Religious Ascetics in Northern India," *ibid.*, XXIV (1940), 81-100.

[5] *A History of Dasnāmī Nāgā Sanyāsīs*. Allahabad: Śrī Panchayata Akhāṛā Mahāṇirvāṇi, 1958.

[6] *Sannyāsī and Fakir Raiders in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1930) and *The Sannyāsis in Mymensingh* (Dacca: Pran Ballav Chakrabarty, [1923]).

[7] *Indian Sādhus* (2nd ed.; Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964).

[8] *The Religion of India*, trans. H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 314.

social, economic or political change and conflict or at the very least have arisen within such an environment. They do not represent the simple evolution or coming to fruition of ideas independent of the social context as is often tacitly assumed. The background of social conflict is evident most obviously in the violent clashes that have often accompanied the appearance of such new movements. What distinguishes militaristic religious groups from non-militaristic ones which become involved in such clashes is, to put it tautologically, their militarism—the fact that military organization and aims are their central characteristic.

This definition is obviously an exceedingly broad one covering a wide range of possible types of movements. Any attempt at constructing a more specific typology among the actual historical examples, however, runs into two sizable problems. In the first place virtually every historical case seems distinct enough to constitute its own subtype. Secondly, most of the movements have at times undergone quite radical changes in their historical character and purpose. Nontheless it appears feasible to at least separate them roughly into two general ideal types: those movements concerned with the protection of specific, local economic and social interests and privileges, and, second, those which partake in large measure the character of popular, sometimes regional rebellions against central authority. The former, since their aims are more limited, are less well-documented, but we will argue that the probable original raison d'être of at least one movement, that of the Dasnāmī nāgās, was the protection of the wealth and lands of the local non-nāgā monasteries of the Dasnāmī orders. An obvious example of a movement whose character approached that of a popular rebellion is provided by the Sikhs. In other cases, however, the character of the movements oscillated between these two extremes, often over a short period of time. This, as we shall see, occurred in the case of the Madārī fakirs of the Sannyāsī Rebellion. Finally it must be noted that the majority of the movements have displayed a decided tendency to degenerate into groups of mercenary soldiers, or even bandits, whose claim to religious motivation is exceedingly dubious.

Even putting to one side several borderline cases it is clear that a number of different groups in India fall within the general category of warrior ascetics including the Dasnāmī nāgās, the Dādū *panthī nāgās*, the Madārī fakirs of the Sannyāsī Rebellion, the early Sikh *khālsā*. and certain groups of Vaiṣṇava *bairāgīs*. Some more problematical cases include various millenarian and social rebellion movements of a religious character such as the poorly documented rebellion of the Satnāmīs of the Narnaul region in 1657[9] and the somewhat better known movements of the Sikh Kukas, who led an abortive rebellion in 1871-72,[10] and of Birsā Muṇḍā, who did the same in the last years of the same century.[11] None of these movements was ever organized well enough militarily to be called a movement of warrior ascetics. A quite different case is that of the Thugs. Although dedicated to violence they were not in any strict sense either military or religious, but are best described as a secret society of bandits.[12] One other borderline movement worthy of mention is the militant, but neither violent nor militaristic, Ramdāsī Sampradāya founded by the seventeenth century Maharashtran Brahman, Rāmadāsa.

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[9] Two brief, roughly contemporary accounts of this rebellion are available in H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson (trans's.), *A History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (Photo reprint of 1867-77 edition: 8 vols.; Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1964), VII, 185-87 and 294-96. Although neither of these texts are sympathetic to the Satnāmīs, both show clearly that this was a popular rebellion initiated by a religious community which was comprised primarily of various types of artisans, small merchants and farmers.

[10] See W. H. McLeod, "The Kukas: A Millenarian Sect of the Punjab," in G. A. Wood and P. S. O'Connor (eds.), *W. P. Morrell: A Tribute* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1973).

[11] See S. B. C. Devalle, "El Movimiento Birsaíta: Un Movimiento Milenario en una Sociedad Tribal," in P. C. Mukherjee, *et al.*, *Movimientos Agrarios y Cambio Social en Asia y Africa* (Mexico, D. F.: El Colegio de Mexico, 1974), pp. 129-79. For a general survey of millenarian movements in India see S. Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay, etc.: Asia Publishing House, 1965).

[12] For an interesting modern appraisal see S. N. Gordon, "Scarf and Sword: Thugs, Marauders, and State-formation in 18th Century Malwa," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, VI (1969), 403-430. The best single source on the Thugs is W. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana, or a Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs* (Calcutta: G. H. Huttmann, Military Orphan Press, 1836).

Outside of India militarist religious movements were particularly prominent in medieval Europe and Japan. In Europe and the Middle East the Knights Templars and the Knights of St. John or Hospitallers provided a colorful chapter to the history of the Crusades.[13] In Japan a dispute between two important Tendai Buddhist monasteries in the late tenth century led to the use of *sohei* or soldier-monks to settle such disputes and give the monasteries political leverage.[14] While this essay will not attempt to make a detailed comparison of the Indian, European and Japanese cases, it may be noted in passing that in each the warrior monks or ascetics arose within a more or less decentralized, "feudal" political structure and a situation of religious and political conflict. Likewise in each case the movements tended to lose their religious character in the course of time and were eventually repressed by new centralized national governments. Another interesting parallel is the fact that both the Templars and the Dasnāmīs, though not necessarily the nāgās, became important bankers and money-lenders.

Religious conflict

The precise historical beginnings of warrior ascetics in India are not clearly known. Most if not all the known groups of warrior ascetics were, however, founded only after the Muslim conquest and evidently were not the result of a gradual evolution of previously existing institutions. This does not mean to say that violent confrontations involving ascetics were not known before this time. Religious conflict, one of the basic preconditions necessary for the rise of warrior ascetics, was present in India at least as early as the sixth century B.C. Most often this conflict took the form of sect competition, usually capped by theological debates and miracle contests between leaders of rival schools or sects. Both early Jain and Buddhist texts are, for instance, full of semi-legendary accounts of such contest-debates between the Buddha or Mahāvīra and rival sages, especially Ājīvikas. On occasion these events seem to have ended in violent confrontations or riots among the opposing groups.[15] On the part of the Hindus we hear as early as in Pāṇini of ascetics who carry an iron lance.[16] Nonetheless there is nowhere any clear indication that early sect competition ever led to the formation of anything resembling military orders.

Right up until the Muslim conquest references to often quite bitter religious conflict are ubiquitous in the Indian epics, purāṇas and narrative literature. Although the Hindu tradition has always been remarkable for the wide range of belief and custom it permitted, certain groups definitely fell outside the pale and were regarded as heretics (*pāṣaṇḍa*) either because, like the Buddhists and Jains, they denied that the Vedas were divinely revealed, or because, like various tantric sects, their practices grossly offended Brahmanical morality. In Hindu literature most descriptions of sect competition degenerating into violence involve conflicts between such heretics and more orthodox Hindu opponents.[17]

One particularly interesting confrontation, documented both in a contemporary inscription and in the Vīraśaiva *Canna-Basava Purāṇa*, occurred between the Śaivite leader Ēkāntada Rāmayya and some Jains at Ablur in Dharwar District, Karnataka, in about 1160 A.D. After the Jains had been defeated in debate they reneged on their promise to convert their temple into a Śaivite shrine. In response Ēkāntada Rāmayya and his

[13] Besides the standard histories of the Crusades see especially Thomas W. Parker, *The Knights Templars in England* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1963).

[14] See G. B. Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

[15] See A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas* (London: Luzac and Company, 1951), pp. 42, 44, 58-61, 84-88, 134-41.

[16] See S. Chattopadhyay, *Evolution of Hindu Sects Up to the Time of Sankaracarya* (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), pp. 92-93. The Chammak copper-plate inscription of the Vakāṭaka king Pravarasena II (c. 410 A.D.), which registers the grant of a village to a thousand Brahmans, contains a curious clause indirectly suggesting possible warlike activity by some Brahmans. This clause specifies that the grant will remain permanently in force provided that, among other prohibitions, the Brahmans do not engage in treachery (*droha*) against the kingdom or make war (*[a]saṃgr[ā]mam kurvatām*) or commit offenses against other villages. See J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, Vol. III of *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1963), pp. 235-43.

[17] See Wendy D. O'Flaherty, "The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology," *History of Religions*, X (1971), 271-333.

followers attacked the temple, defeated its Jain defenders and demolished the buildings.[18]

Although there is no evidence that the opposing bands led by Ēkāntada Rāmayya and the Jains were organized in military fashion, such militarization is at least hinted at in Mādhavācārya's account of the legendary encounter between the great Śaṅkarācārya (?788-820 A.D.) and his followers and the tantric Kāpālikas led by Krakaca or Nityānanda. After Śaṅkara's patron and protector King Sudhanvan had offended Krakaca, the Kāpālika raised his battle axe and "sent forth innumerable hosts of enraged Kapālins whose terrifying shouts thundered like the clouds of the great deluge as they attacked with their weapons held aloft." When King Sudhanvan counterattacked, Krakaca told his followers to attack and massacre the defenseless Brahmins in another part of the field. When the Brahmins saw the thousands of Kāpālikas "rushing towards them like the army of the God of Death . . . eager to kill with their swords, lances, spears and tridents," they sought the protection of their guru, Śaṅkara, who reduced the majority of the enemy to ashes by his yogic power, Sudhanvan and his troops killed thousands more. Finally Krakaca summoned the aid of the god Bhairava. Since Śaṅkara was himself an incarnation of this god, when Bhairava appeared he quickly dispatched the Kāpālika.[19]

The militarism of these tantric ascetics is striking even if not described in detail. Nonetheless recent researches by Baldev Upādhyāy, Śrī Bālśāstri Hardās, and W. R. Antarkar have shown conclusively that the Mādhavācārya who compiled the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* cannot be dated earlier than sometime between the years 1630 and 1800 although many of the verses found in this text were borrowed from earlier works.[20] Another important hagiography which recounts this episode, the *Śaṅkaravijaya* of Anantānandagiri, is older but still cannot be dated earlier than the 14th century A.D. and significantly omits any reference to the martial character of the dispute.[21] It is most probable, therefore, that Krakaca's military legions are an anachronism introduced by an author familiar with the military orders of later medieval India.

If direct sect competition in pre-Muslim India never led to more than sporadic, unorganized outbursts of violence, a potentially more significant form of aggression against religious institutions was royal persecution. This might be motivated by either religious or economic considerations or a combination of both. Unfortunately the nature of the main source of ancient Indian history, royal grants to temples and monasteries, makes it unlikely that much evidence of such persecution should have survived. In general the inscriptional evidence indicates that most kings, whatever their personal religious preference, officially supported a variety of different sects and tried to discourage excessive sect competition. The most striking example of this policy found in the inscriptions of Aśoka (*c.* 269-232 B.C.). Despite his own clear personal preference for Buddhism, time and again in his edicts he counsels his subjects to show deference and be generous to "brahmans and *śramaṇas.*" In his twelfth Major Rock Edict he preaches the "essential doctrine of all sects," described as based on "the control of one's speech, so as not to extoll one's own sect or disparage another's on unsuitable occasions, or at least to do so only mildly on certain occasions."[22] He confirms his official impartiality by the donation of at least two caves at Barābar in modern Bihar to Ājīvikas and by the appointment of "officers of *Dhamma*" who are instructed to variously "concern themselves with the Buddhist Order, with brahmans and *Ājīvikas* . . ., with the Jainas . . ., and with various sects."[23]

Notwithstanding the tolerant, peacemaking attitude of most kings, both legendary and more

[18] See J. F. Fleet, "Inscriptions at Ablur," *Epigraphia Indica*, V, 213-65 (Inscription no. E). See also *Canna-Basava Purana*, trans. G. Würth in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, VIII (1864-66), 98-221.

[19] Mādhavācārya, *Śaṅkara-digvijaya* (Poona: Ānandāśram Press, 1915), chapter 15, verses 8-28. See also Anantānandagiri, *Śrī Śaṅkaravijaya*, ed. N. Veezhinathan (Madras: University of Madras, 1971), chapter 23. In this latter work Krakaca is called Nityānanda.

[20] See W. R. Antarkar, "Saṅksepa Śaṅkara Jaya of Mādhavācārya or Śaṅkara Digvijaya of Śrī Vidyāraṇyamuni," *Journal of the University of Bombay* XLI (New Series), No. 77 (1972), pp. 1-23.

[21] See W. R. Antarkar, "Śaṅkaravijaya of Anantānandagiri," *Journal of the University of Bombay*, XXX (new Series), Part 2 (1961), pp. 73-80.

[22] Trans. Romila Thapar in her *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 255.

[23] See *ibid.*, pp. 260, 265.

historical exceptions to such forbearance are recorded. According to South Indian legend, for instance, a Pāṇḍya king converted to Śaivism from Jainism by Ñānasambandar, the famous *nāyanār*, celebrated the event by impaling 8,000 of his former coreligionists.[24] A number of more credible examples are found in Kalhaṇa's history of the kings of Kashmir, the *Rājataraṅginī*. The importance of these examples cannot be overestimated since this work remains, in spite of scholarly protestations to the contrary, the only real classical political history which survives written in an Indian language. In the absence of similar histories of other regions we can only assume that the situation was similar elsewhere.

In brief what the *Rājataraṅginī* suggests is that the relation of church and state in ancient India, particularly during the post-Gupta epoch, was far from continually harmonious. In most cases the conflicts seem to have been basically economic and not religious. The more important examples begin with a son and successor of Aśoka named Jalauka. This king, unknown from other sources, was a Śaivite whose hostility to Buddhism induced him to destroy a *vihāra* whose music had bothered him. Later a "witch" convinced him to rebuild the vihāra.[25] Another early king named Gonanda III, placed by Kalhaṇa shortly after the Kuṣāṇas, is said to have promoted the traditional Hindu rites which had ceased to be observed owing to the predominance of the Buddhists. This neglect had caused the divine Nāgas to send down excessive snow. After the king reinstituted the pilgrimages and sacrifices in honor or these gods "the Bhikṣus and snow calamities ceased altogether [to give trouble]."[26]

These two examples are clearly legendary. The succeeding ones have a progressively firmer historical footing and give significantly less weight to religious factors in the conflicts. King Tārāpīḍa (*c.* 725 A.D.) of the Kārkoṭa dynasty is portrayed as a godless tyrant whose life the oppressed Brahmans destroyed through witchcraft.[27] A later king of this dynasty named Jayapīḍa (*c.* 790 A.D.) is said to have been a worthy king until near the end of his reign when excessive greed caused him to oppress his subjects including the Brahmans. In response ninety-nine Brahmans "sought death in the water" of the Tūlamūlya River. This dramatic gesture forced the king to desist "from confiscating the Agrahāras," but a renewed quarrel between the king and the Brahmans resulted in his death from a Brahman's curse.[28]

In Kalhaṇa's account of the reign of Śaṅkaravarman (883-902) this king, like Jayapīḍa, grows progressively more avaricious until he too begins to tax and confiscate the wealth of the temples:

> He took from the temples the profits arising from the sale of incense, sandal-wood, and other [articles of worship], under the pretext that they were the [king's legal] share of the selling price.
>
> Then, again, he plundered straightway sixty-four temples, through special officers placed over them under the pretence of [exercising] supervision.
>
> The king resumed the villages which belonged to the temples, against a compensatory assignment (*pratikara*), and [then] cultivated the land himself as [if he were] an agriculturist.[29]

King Kṣemagupta (950-58) was a weak, vice-ridden ruler whose most noteworthy acts were the destruction of the Buddhist Jayendravihāra in Srinagar and the construction of a temple of Kṣemagaurīśvara with the help of stones from the ruins. Thirty-six villages belonging to the former vihāra were given "into the tenure" of a neighboring king and ally. In return this king gave Kṣemagupta "his own daughter Diddā in marriage." This infamous queen held the real power during the reign of Kṣemagupta's son, and after eliminating her three grandsons one by one she ruled in her own name from 980 to 1003 with the help of her valiant but low-born paramour and prime minister, Tuṅga. Repeated disputes between Tuṅga and the Brahmans characterized the entire period until his death during the reign of Diddā's successor Saṅgrāmarāja (1003-1028). The reason for the dissatisfaction of the Brahmans is never indicated, but it is probable that financial exactions as well as Tuṅga's low birth played a part. The most frequent tactic the Brahmans used against him was a solemn hunger strike (*prāyopaveśa*) coupled with secret alliances with pretenders to the throne. These hunger strikes are

[24] See K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 413.

[25] Kalhaṇa, *Rājataraṅginī*, trans. M. A. Stein (2 vols.; reprint of 1900 ed.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1961), I, 25-26 (verses i. 131-147).

[26] *Ibid.*, I, 32-33 (verses i.177-186).

[27] *Ibid.*, I, 130 (verses iv.119-125).

[28] *Ibid.*, I, 176-79 (verses iv.620-657).

[29] *Ibid.*, I, 208 (verses v. 165-170).

said to have caused the "whole of the people" to be in an uproar, but Tuṅga's valor and timely bribes to the leaders of the Brahmans repeatedly defused the crises. In one case it was agreed that Tuṅga should resign, but the Brahmans presented a further unreasonable demand and "a strife arose, and suddenly swords were drawn for the destruction of these impure Brahmans." Most managed to escape. Eventually Tuṅga's luck ran out thanks in part to popular resentment against the harsh exactions of his assistant, Bhadreśvara.[30]

Kalhaṇa's own father was a minister of the mercurial King Harṣa (1089-1101) whose "extravagant expenditure upon various corps of his army" led him to ruthlessly expropriate the wealth of temples and earn the epithet *turuṣka*. Harṣa is said to have plundered "from all temples the wonderful treasures which former kings had bestowed there" and to have appointed a "prefect for the overthrow of divine images" who had the statues of the gods elaborately defiled by "crippled naked mendicants" and lepers and then melted down for the royal treasury. Only a few shrines, both Buddhist and Hindu, were excepted. Harṣa's eventual downfall and death occurred during a revolt of the oppressed feudal landholders or *ḍāmaras* who allied themselves with two ambitious princes of a collateral line of the dynasty.[31]

These examples of pre-Muslim persecution of religious institution in Kashmir merit citation both because they demonstrate that such persecution was, at least in post-Gupta times, much more common than historians generally admit and because they indicate that the principal motive of such persecution was economic and not religious. In the opinion of modern economic historians, notably R. S. Sharma, the post-Gupta era saw a progressive alienation of more and more taxable land through grants to temples, monasteries and communities of Brahmans (*agrahāras*). This alienation is thought to have played an important role in the development of a "feudal" political and economic structure.[32] Any king who wished to reduce the power of the feudal barons, in Kashmir the *ḍāmaras*, had virtually no other place to turn raise the necesary funds except the religious institutions. The evidence of Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* suggests that they often did not hesitate to do so.

Of special significance from our point of view is the fact that the Brahmans did not resist directly by military force but instead with the threat of witchcraft or a curse or with passive resistance in the form of a religious fast (*prāyopaveśa*) and suicide, sometimes combined with intrigues and alliances with rebellious barons and pretenders to the throne. Although knowledge of the situation in other parts of India is more circumstantial, it is evident from the accounts of the raids of the iconoclast Mahmud of Ghazni in the early eleventh century that the Hindu temples of North India were then only poorly if at all defended.

Muslim rule did not introduce a totally new situation. It did, however, give a religious sanction to the persecution of non-Muslim religious institutions and the confiscation of their wealth and tax-free land holdings. Even so, pragmatic Muslim rulers often preferred the popular support of their mostly Hindu subjects to the demands of zealous Muslim divines and counselors and restrained the attacks against, and rarely even supported, Hindu institutions. Kashmir is again a good case in point since it remains the only area for which there exists a contemporary history written from the Hindu point of view, namely the continuation of Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* by Jonarāja (died 1459) and his pupil Śrīvara. Muslim rule in Kashmir began in about 1339 when Shāh Mīr or Shams-ud-dīn, the Muslim prime minister of the former Hindu king, defeated the king's widow who had attempted to rule in her own name. Shāh Mīr's first few successors were remarkably tolerant of the religion of their overwhelmingly Hindu subjects, but this situation changed radically during the reign of the *Sultan* Sikandar (1389-1413). During this period large numbers of foreign Muslims immigrated to Kashmir and their presence helped embolden Sikandar's iconoclastic zeal against the Hindu infidels. With the assistance of his minister Sūhabhaṭṭa, a convert from Hinduism, Sikandar "forgot his kingly duties and took a delight day and night in breaking images . . . . There was no city, no town, no village, no wood where Sūha the Turushka left the

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[30] *Ibid.*, I, 247-274 (verses vi.150-vi.84).

[31] *Ibid.*, I, 351-54 and 363-400 (verses vii. 1072-1108 and 1219-1712).

[32] See R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*: (*c. 300-1200*) (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965). See also R. Coulborn, "Feudalism, Brahmanism, and the Intrusion of Islam upon Indian History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, X (1968), 356-74.

temples of gods unbroken."[33] During the reign of Sikandar's successor, 'Alī Shāh, Sūhabhaṭṭa extended his activities with a cruel persecution of the Brahmans as a caste. Nonetheless during the reign of 'Alī Shāh's successor, the great Zain-ul'Ābidīn (1420-1470), the persecution was terminated and the Brahmans given back many of their lost privileges.

Roughly speaking the experience of Kashmir with regard to Hindu-Muslim relations was paralleled in other areas of India including the central Delhi Sultanate and Empire. Some of the Muslim rulers maintained what might be called an attitude of hostile neutrality towards their Hindu subjects, some openly persecuted them, and a few—most notably the Mughul emperor Akbar—actively worked to enlist their support. There is little doubt, however, that in areas under direct Muslim rule the Hindus were often treated as decided second-class citizens. Legally regarded as *zimmis*, their religious freedom was restricted and they were required to pay the onerous *jizya* tax. Hindu temple and monasteries suffered a loss of royal patronage while the building of new temples and the repair of old ones was prohibited. In addition there is little doubt that many temples lost possession of some or all of the tax-free land which supported them although such confiscations are difficult to document.[34]

The conclusion we may draw from the preceding, somewhat lengthy digression is that if we grant that the basic purpose of the resort of military organization by religious institutions was the protection of these institutions from robbery and/or state persecution, a supposition which is probable *a priori*, then we may in part attribute the appearance of such ascetics in the medieval period to the new religious sanction which Islam gave to such persecutions. Although Hindu kings of Kashmir like Jayapīḍa, Śaṅkaravarman and Harṣa oppressed Brahmans and temples, they did so against public opinion and against their own religious tenets. Muslim rulers who did the same had the support both of their co-religionist subjects and of Muslim law and tradition. Whether or not state persecution of Brahmans and confiscation of the wealth of Hindu religious institutions actually became more frequent—a point which is uncertain but probable—the coming of Islam did make it possible to openly advocate or threaten such actions. It also tended to foster local conflicts between Muslim fakirs and Hindu monks and these conflicts may have been as much responsible for the militarization of the fakirs and monks as any "official" persecution. Whatever the exact case, the new situation was evidently sufficient to provoke the creation of the military orders. Nonetheless it must be emphasized that the basic economic and political preconditions were present even before the conquest and stemmed from the three way struggle for control of accumulated wealth and land revenue, and hence of political and military power, among the kings and sultans, their barons and generals, and the temples and monasteries. The groups of religious ascetics made their appearance, necessarily, in an environment of political and economic weakness and decentralization and tended to prosper most in times of political and economic crisis. This explains, for instance, why they had their greatest prominence in the eighteenth century, first during the confused formation of the successor states of the Mughal empire and still more during the collapse of the administrative structure and economies of these states under the disruptive effects of conquest and colonial exploitation by the East India Company. It also accounts for the fact that they were strongest in border areas, particularly the Punjab. Rajasthan, Bengal and the Maratha territories where imperial authority was weakest.

Warrior ascetics in Mediaeval India

As far as can be determined the first important religious groups to take to arms following the Muslim conquest appeared among the Nāth or Kānphaṭā yogīs, often called simply yogīs or *jogīs*. This sect traced its origin to the legendary saint Gorakhnāth or Gorakṣanātha who probably flourished in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Unfortunately very little is known about the early history of this heterodox Śaivite sect or about its political and military activities in Mughal and later times.

The earliest well-documented armed clash involving warrior ascetics in India occurred in the presence of the emperor Akbar near Thaneswar

[33] Jonarāja as quoted in R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Delhi Sultanate* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1960), p. 378. The discussion of the early sultans of Kashmir is mostly based on this work, pp. 372-86.

[34] See *ibid.*, pp. 615-39 and Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1972) for two rather contrasting views of medieval Hindu Muslim relations.

in about A.D. 1567. The skirmish was not between Hindus and Muslims, however, but between two different Hindu orders. Accounts of the event are found in Nizām-ud-dīn Ahmad's *Tabaqāt-i-Akbarī* and in Abu-'l Fazl's *Akbar-nāma*.[35] Nizam-ud-dīn calls the antagonists Jogīs and Sannyāsīs while Abu-'l Fazl refers to them as Gurs and Puris. These latter two names may be safely identified as Giris and Puris, two of the ten orders of Dasnāmī ascetics reputedly established by the great theologian Śaṅkarācārya (?788-820 A.D.). It is from these two orders that most of the Dasnāmī warrior ascetics or *nāgās* seem to have come. According to Nizām-ud-dīn, the Sannyāsīs were outnumbered by two or three hundred to five hundred by the near-naked Jogīs. The emperor then had a number of his soldiers smear themselves with ashes and give support to the Sannyāsīs. With these soldiers' help the Sannyāsīs emerged victorious.

The evidence regarding the founding of the six akhāṛās or "regiments" of Dasnāmī nāgās, so-called from their habit of going about "naked" (*nāgā*), is uncertain and conflicting. This lack of historical data tends to support our belief that the Dasnāmī nāgā akhāṛās were created to defend local interests such as the lands and treasure of temples and monasteries since such defense would be unlikely to attract the interest of Muslim historians in the same way as did the Sikh and Satnāmī rebellions. The earliest source on the founding of akhāṛās is a Hindi manuscript of probably the nineteenth century which was loaned to J. Sarkar by the Nirvāṇī akhāṛā. This document, as summarized by Sarkar, purports to give the spiritual genealogies of the heads of the six akhāṛās and to describe some of the more important battles in which they took part. It dates the establishment of each of the akhāṛās as follows: 547 or 1547 A.D. for the Āvāhan akhāṛā, 646 or 1646 for the Atal akhāṛā, 749 or 1749 for the Nirvāṇī, 856 or 1856 for the Ānand, 904 or 1904 for the Nirañjanī and 1146 for the Jūnā (originally Bhairava) akhāṛās.[36] Two of the more interesting events mentioned in the manuscript are a battle between the Nirvāṇī and some *bairāgīs*, i.e., Vaiṣṇava ascetics, at Hardwar, the famous pilgrimage center, in about 1254 A.D. and another battle between the same akhāṛā and a sultan, possibly Aurangzeb, in 1664. Unfortunately none of these dates and traditions can be corroborated from other sources.

An important legend about the origin of the various akhāṛās of Dasnāmī nāgās was recorded by J. N. Farquhar, apparently from oral reports obtained at a monastery of the Sarasvatī order in Varanasi and another of the Giri order in Allahabad:

> In the sixteenth century there were in North India thousands of Muslim *faqirs* who went about armed, took part in the wars of the time, and, when there was no regular war, fought for their own hand. One of their practices, as good Muslims, was to attack and kill sannyāsīs as representatives of Hinduism . . . . Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, a well-known sannyāsī scholar . . ., at last went to Akbar to see whether anything could be done for the protection of the ancient order to which he belonged. Rājā Birbal was present at the interview and suggested the way out of the difficulty. He advised Madhusūdana to initiate large numbers of non-Brahmans into the sannyāsī order and arm them for the protection of Brahman sannyāsīs. The Emperor agreed that armed sannyāsīs should be protected by their sacred character from government interference. Madhusūdana, therefore, went and initiated large numbers of Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas into seven of the [ten] sub-orders . . . .[37]

Although some of the details of this legend are suspicious, in general it is plausible and congruent with the idea that the nāgās were established to defend Dasnāmī interests. Unfortunately, however, the legend does not harmonize well with the 1254 A.D. date for a battle between the Nirvāṇī akhāṛā and the *bairāgīs* mentioned in the Nirvāṇī akhāṛā Hindi manuscript. More importantly it partly conflicts with the better documented fight between the Giris and Puris (or Jogīs and Sannyāsīs) witnessed by Akbar in 1567 since this fight suggests that the akhāṛās had already been in existence some time. In the circumstances it is best to suspend judgement about the whole question.

The evidence regarding the establishment of the military akhāṛās of the chief four sectarian traditions (*sampradāya*) of the Vaiṣṇavas, namely those descended from Rāmānanda, Madhva, Viṣṇu-

[35] Elliot and Dowson (transs.), V, 318.

[36] J. Sarkar, pp. 82-90. The ambiguities in the dates are obviously caused by the lack of a sign for one thousand.

[37] J. N. Farquhar, "The Organization . . .," p. 483.

svāmin and Nimbārka, is even less certain.[38] The warrior bairāgīs are said to be divided into seven akhāṛās, presumably organized on the model of the Dasnāmī nāgā akhāṛās. Members of each akhāṛā may be drawn from any of the four sampradāyas. When these akhāṛās were first founded, however, is not known. Among the warrior bairāgīs commensal rules as well as prohibitions against the eating of meat and taking of narcotics seem to have been generally ignored, as they were among the Dasnāmī nāgās. Most of the few historical references to these Vaiṣṇava akhāṛas that exist mention clashes with Dasnāmī nāgās or Nāth yogīs rather than with Muslims. The disputes were frequently "over the policing of the great religious fairs, and the collection of pilgrim dues."[39] The several akhāṛās of sannyāsīs and bairāgīs still jealously guard their rights of precedence in the parades of the Kumbha Melas at Allahabad and other religious fairs.

One vaguely Vaiṣṇava sect in which warrior ascetics became prominent was that founded by the sixteenth century cotton carder Dādū in the Rajasthan region. Spiritually descended from the radical wing of Rāmānanda's sampradāya in which the weaver Kabīr played a central role, Dādū stressed the universality of the one God and the religious equality of all men. The exact origins of the soldier ascetics among the Dādū panthīs are unknown, a fact which again suggests the defense of local interests as a probable motive. It is likely that armed nāgās first were recruited in this sect during the strong leadership of the guru, Jait Sahib (1693-1732). By the latter half of the eighteenth century they were already being used in the military forces of the Mahārājā of Jaipur. Orr reports that a document dated in the year 1733 mentions the use of Dādū panthīs as tax farmers by the Jaipur mahārājās. Most probably the military nāgās of the sect were employed to help enforce payment of taxes by reluctant landholders and peasants. In 1793 some sort of contract was made between the Dādū panthīs and the state of Jaipur by which the sect agreed to provide five thousand soldier ascetics for the defense of the state. During the mutiny of 1857 they rendered valuable service as mercenaries for the British.[40]

The most famous group of warrior ascetics, though "ascetic" in a limited sense, is undoubtedly the Sikh khālsā.[41] The message of the early Sikh gurus, beginning with Guru Nānak (1469-1539), was inspired by the same monotheistic, egalitarian devolutionalism which influenced Dādū. These teachings had great appeal to the Jatta or Jāṭ peasantry of the Punjab and it is they who former the backbone of Nānak's movement. This semi-tribal ethnic group encompassed a whole range of peasant and artisan castes but nonetheless maintained a considerable degree of social self-identity. The Jāṭs have been traditionally noted both for their diligence as workers and their manliness as warriors. Frequently they organized themselves into all Jāṭ villages autonomous in all but the paying of a yearly village tax.[42]

In the fifteenth century the population of the Punjab was divided into a number of different castes and ethnic groups descended from a variety of successive invaders including several clans of Rajputs. Religiously it was divided into a number of different Hindu and Muslim sects. In spite of these divisions, however, by the end of the century a common language and shared history had produced, according to Kushwant Singh, at least the beginnings of a Punjabi proto-nationalism.[43]

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[38] These sampradāyas are named, respectively, the Śrī, Brahmā, Rudra and Sanakādi. In fact this classification scheme is somewhat artificial since each sampradāya may contain several separate sects not all of which may acknowledge their membership in it. See J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (reprint of 1920 ed.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), pp. 327-28.

[39] See W. G. Orr, "Armed Religious Ascetics . . .," pp. 88-90.

[40] See W. G. Orr, *A Sixteenth-Century Indian Mystic* (London: Iutterworth Press, 1947), pp. 199-208.

[41] The word "ascetic" is obviously used throughout this paper in a very loose sense and incorporates under this heading all manner of yogīs, sannyāsis, sādhus, fakirs, and bairāgīs not all of whom are necessarily celebate.

[42] See Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (2 vols.: Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), I, 3-16. On the Jāts see also M. C. Pradhan, "Some Aspects of the Jat Religion and Ethics," in M. C. Pradhan, *et al*, (eds.), *Anthropology and Archaeology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 229-57. Today the Jattas and the Jāṭs can be socially distinguished. Most Jattas are Punjabi speakers and non-vegetarians. Most Jāṭs are Braj speakers and vegetarians. The majority of Jattas are Sikhs, while a majority of Jāṭs are Hindus.

[43] See *A History* . . ., I, 3-16.

The story of the step by step transformation of the pacifistic sect founded by Nānak into the militaristic khālsā brotherhood initiated by Govind Singh in 1699 is well known and need not be retold here.[44] It will suffice to note that there existed a reciprocal relation between the militarism of the Sikhs and the efforts of the Mughal rulers and their feudatories (*jāgīrdārs*) to increase tax revenues and otherwise impose their authority upon them. Aurangzeb's Islamic zeal helped to provoke the Sikh rebellion but of at least equal importance was the agrarian crisis provoked by the excessive tax demands placed on the peasantry. These demands and the resultant crisis, which have been brilliantly documented by Irfan Habib, were based in part on the system of jāgīr or land assignment transfers. This system meant that the jāgīrdārs had more interest in extracting as much revenue as possible as quickly as possible than in the long term prosperity of their assignments. As a consequence many peasants fled their lands or were forced to supplement their income by theft or starve. Others organized rebellions among which Habib cites as most important those of the Jāṭs of the Agra region in about 1669, the religiously inspired revolt of the Satnāmīs of the Narnaul region in 1657, and, most importantly, the continuing resistence of the Sikhs.[45]

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and of the last Sikh guru, Gobind Singh, in 1708, their struggle was continued by the former Vaiṣṇava bairāgī, Banda. After Banda's capture in 1716 Sikh fortunes suffered a long eclipse but were again revived after the Maratha defeat at Panipat in 1761. Under the leadership of Ranjit Singh (1790-1839) the Sikhs succeeded in making the Punjab an independent state, but the rise of a new strong central power led to its collapse shortly after his death. Nonetheless Sikh solidarity and ambition lived on in muted form, first in the unsuccessful revolt of the millenarian Kukas and later in the more successful fight for a Sikh-dominated Punjabi state within the Indian union.

The sporadically chaotic period between the deaths of Aurangzeb and Ranjit Singh marks the political and military heyday not only of the Sikhs but of other groups of warrior ascetics as well. Particularly during the bleak period of the initial consolidation of British colonial rule (1763-93), the fragmentation of political power among a large number of competing and often openly warring factions—Mughals and Marathas, Afghans and Rajputs, Nawabs and Europeans—led to a corresponding breakdown of authority on a more local level. Large scale banditry such as that of the Piṇḍārīs and Thugs became widespread and even small zamindars organized their own private armies or police.[46] In this environment the need for warrior ascetics to protect the extensive lands and wealth of temples and monasteries increased, as did the temptation for them to become simple mercenary soldiers and independent political adventurers.

Two famous Dasnāmī nāgās who clearly succumbed to this temptation were Rajendra Giri Gosāīn (died 1753) and Anūpgiri alias Himmat Bahādur (1730-1804). Between the years 1751 and 1753 the former sannyāsī and his followers were "the principal support" of Safdar Jang of Avadh, the chancellor (*wazīr*) of the Mughal emperor. Anūpgiri, who seems to have been a disciple of Rajendra Giri, continued to render service to Safdar Jaṅg and then to his successor Shujā-ud-Daulāh. During his long career Anūpgiri and his followers proved their loyalty to their Mughal patron against the upstart Hindu rājā of Benares, Balwant Singh, and later aided the British in the suppression of Shamsher Bahādur in Bundelkhand. Anūpgiri ended his career the de facto ruler of a large part of this region.[47]

A contemporary account of some of these nāgā sannyāsī mercenaries by a European is found in the *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp During the Year 1809* of Thomas Broughton:

> The Gosaeens are a religious order of Hindoo mendicants, who attach themselves to the service of par-

[44] A convenient summary is found in *ibid.*, pp. 17-98. It should be noted, however, that a truly critical history of this transformation is only now in the process of being written thanks to the efforts of J. S. Grewal, W. H. McLeod and other scholars.

[45] See Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 317-51.

[46] On the complicated division of authority in Mughal times, especially after the death of Aurangzeb, see R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). The articles by S. Nurul Hasan and B. S. Cohn are of greatest relevance.

[47] See J. Sarkar, pp. 123-261, for a very full treatment of these two ascetics' adventures.

ticular chiefs, great wealth, and raise themselves into consequence. They then adopt Chelas; and are themselves styled *Gooroos*, or teachers . . . . When they become numerous and wealthy, and enrol themselves as a military band in the service of some Prince, their leader is termed *Muhunt*: they then retain but little of their original manner and appearance; distinguishing themselves alone by the *jutta*, or long matted hair folded like a turban on the head, and having some portion of their dress dyed of a kind of orange colour, called *Geroo*, peculiar to their sect. As soldiers, they are accounted brave and faithful.[48]

At about the same period Broughton's compatriot James Tod had occasion to witness the elaborate military display of Damodra, the chief abbot of the famous Nāthdvāra temple of the Vāllabhācāryas in Mewar, Rajasthan. Tod's portrait is of particular value since it clearly illustrates the use of troops, presumably soldier bairāgīs, to defend the lands and wealth of temples:

The present pontiff is now about thirty years of age He is of a benign aspect, with much dignity of demeanour: courteous, yet exacting the homage due to his high calling: meek, as becomes the priest of Govinda, but with the finished manners of one accustomed to the first society . . . . . He has but one wife, nor does Crishna allow polygamy to his priest. In times of danger, like some of his prototypes in the dark ages of Europe, he posed the lance, and found it more effective than spiritual anathemas, against those who would first adore the god, and then plunder him. Such were the Mahratta chiefs, Jeswunt Rao Holkar and Bapoo Sindia. Damodra accordingly made the tour of his extensive diocese at the head of four hungred horse, two standards of foot, and two field-pieces. He rode the finest mares in the country: laid aside his pontificals for the quilted *dugla*, and was summoned to matins by the kettle-drum instead of the bell and cymbal[49]

The Sannyāsī Rebellion

The most curious and complex example of warrior ascetic activity comes, however, from Bengal. The so-called Sannyāsī Rebellion has fascinated historians of all types and persuasions. It has been described as everything from a precocious guerrilla war for India's independence to a haphazard outbreak of banditry. Although I will not review here the many different interpretations that have been made,[50] it is worth noting that all are in fact based primarily on just two or three sources: W. W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*[51] and J. M. Ghosh's *Sannyāsi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal* and his less known *The Sannyāsis in Mymensingh*. Although Ghosh's books lack any significant analysis or appreciation of the socio-economic background such as the relevance of the dislocations caused by the famine of 1770, they do contain a careful reconstruction of the history of the many conflicts involving *sannyāsis* and fakirs in Bengal during the second half of the eighteenth century which have collectively come to be called a "rebellion." The lack of socio-economic analysis in Ghosh's books is to some degree compensated for by that of Hunter who argues that the upsurge of conflicts involving the sannyāsīs and fakirs was simply one of the disastrous effects of the 1770 famine. Hunter, however, tends to lump together the sannyāsīs and fakirs with all manner of "bandits," "marauders," and "freebooters" who appeared as a result of the famine, a view which Ghosh's detailed history shows is only partly correct.

My own reading of the sources suggests that there were in fact three quite separate phenomena involved and that they did not comprise a "rebellion" nor were the *sannyāsis* the main participants. The most important of these phenomena, and the one to which most modern scholars seem to be referring when they talk of the Sannyāsī Rebellion, was the annual pilgrimage to various sites in northern and central Bengal by a group of Muslim fakirs known as Madārīs who traced their spiritual descent from a semi-legendary Syrian saint who came to India in the fifteenth century and has his tomb at Makanpur in Uttar Pradesh. The doctrines of the sect borrow much from both Hinduism and Christianity while the dress and behavior of the fakirs are modeled in large part on those of Hindu yogīs and sannyāsīs. Perhaps the earliest description of them is found in Moh-

[48] T. D. Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp During the Year 1809* (London: John Murray, 1813), pp. 129-30.

[49] J. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (2 vols.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), I, 438.

[50] I have summarized and criticized some representative interpretations in "La rebelión de los Sannyāsīs," *Estudios Orientales*, IX (1974), 2-13. Some of the discussion which follows on the rebellion is based on this article.

[51] (2nd ed.: New York: Leypoldt and Holt, 1868).

san Fani's seventeenth century *Dabistan.* According to this work, the Madārīs, "like the Sanyāsīs *Avadhuts*, wear the hair entangled; and the ashes which they and the Sanyāsīs rub upon their bodies are called *bhasma*; besides they carry iron chains on their heads and necks, and have black flags and black turbans; they know neither prayers nor fasts; they are always sitting at a fire; they drink a great deal of bang; and the most perfect among them go about without any dress, in severe cold, in Kabul and Kachmir, and such places."[52] A group of these fakirs received the right to collect "contributions" from various village headmen and zamindars and other special privileges in a *sanad* granted by Prince Shāh Shūjā in 1629.[53] The fakir pilgrims seem to have followed a more or less set route along which they collected such contributions with few complaints from the headmen and zamindars.

After the East India Company received the *dīwānī* or right to collect taxes and administer civil justice in Bengal in 1765, the tax demands were increased and these headmen and zamindars found themselves in a financial squeeze in which they were unable to pay both the British and the fakir pilgrims. The disastrous famine considerably aggravated the situation since its net effect was both to swell the ranks of fakirs and reduce the amount of land under cultivation. The British, partly on their own decision and partly on the instigation of the zamindars, then attempted to keep the fakirs out of Bengal altogether.

The initial reaction of the fakirs to the British attacks, as far as can be determined, was to turn for support to their traditional hosts, the zamindars, some of whom were being driven to consider rebellion because of the excessive tax demands of the British. It is in this context that the famous letter of the fakir leader Majnū Shāh to the Rānī Bhawānī of Natore should be placed. In it Majnū Shāh cites for this powerful and aristocratic zamindar the long history of the Madārī pilgrimages through Bengal and complains that in the previous year (1771) "150 fakirs were without cause put to death." He admits that the fakirs had had to somewhat change their modus operandi and ends with a plea for the rāṇī's protection:

> Formerly the fakirs begged in separate and detached parties but now we are all collected and beg together. Displeased at this method they (the British) obstruct us in visiting the shrines and other places—this is unreasonable. You are the ruler of the country. We are Fakirs who pray always for your welfare. We are full of hopes.[54]

These hopes were never realized and the fakirs were increasingly forced to band together and arm themselves in a losing struggle against an alliance of the zamindars and the British.[55]

The attitude of the poorer classes to the Madārīs and these events is uncertain. In some letters and reports by British officials they are said to have been oppressed by the fakirs and even to have voluntarily joined in the fight against them. In others they are said to have aided the fakirs by hiding them or misleading the authorities about their whereabouts. One or two sources suggest that the ranks of the fakirs were increased by peasants forced off their lands by excessive exactions.[56] Even if this is partially true, it is clear that the Madārīs never led what could realistically be called a popular rebellion of the lower classes.

The other two phenomena which contributed to the illusion of a Sannyāsī Rebellion did at least concern the Dasnāmī nāgā sannyāsīs. In the latter

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[52] Mohsan Fani, *The Dabistan or School of Manners*, trans. D. Shea and A. Troyer (3 vols.; Paris: 1843), II, 225-26.

[53] Relevant portions of the *sanad* are translated in Ghosh, *Sannyāsī and Fakir Raiders . . .*, p. 22. His footnoted reference is to *Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* of 1903 not to the journal itself. The article is only a paragraph abstract of a paper read before the society. The actual text of the *sanad* seems not to be available.

[54] Ghosh, *Sannyāsī and Fakir . . .*, p. 47.

[55] Although Ghosh does not explicitly drawn these conclusions in the printed edition of *Sannyāsi and Fakir Raiders* he does pretty much do so in a hand-written note to his own copy of the text which was kindly lent to me by Prof. John Broomfield. In this note Ghosh says (p. 23): "As has been stated before, the Sannyasis and the Fakirs came to Bengal to attend various religious and bathing festivals and were entertained by the inhabitants and presumably the Zamindars bore the expenses from the revenue collections. The English Company opposed this in the districts ceded to them by Mir Kasim in 1760, and then after assumption of Dewany in 1765. Thus opposed they came in bands fully armed to establish their rights . . . ."

[56] See *ibid.*, pp. 45, 102.

part of the eighteenth century, as we have noted, large bands of these soldier sannyāsīs existed in northern India ready to fight as mercenaries for whoever would employ them: Hindu, Muslim or English. In the early 1770's some of these mercenaries did in fact engage in free lance plundering in Bengal. Their most important involvement, however, was in the struggle for succession to the throne of Cooch Behar in extreme northeastern Bengal. In this complex dispute which flared up periodically between about 1765 and 1790 the sannyāsīs usually were on one side and the English on the other. Most of the sannyāsī mercenaries, however, had left the region by about 1775 for the Maratha territories to participate in the wars of central India in which Rajendra Giri Gosāīn and Anūpgiri played such an important role.[57]

The third phenomenon involved in the so-called rebellion was the attempt by Dasnāmī sannyāsīs resident in local monasteries to collect debts owed to them by many zamindars. The extensive money lending and trade carried on by these sannyāsīs not only in Bengal but throughout northern India has to some extent been documented by J. M. Ghosh, B. S. Cohn and D. H. A. Kolff.[58] Cohn speculates that the success of the *sannyāsīs* in these wordly endeavors was made possible by the rules of inheritance which allowed a guru's chief disciple "to get the lion's share" of the goods and capital belonging to his teacher whereas natural sons of rich men had to divide their father's wealth equally under Hindu law. Also significant for the process of capital accumulation was the fact that monks "were not forced into the lavish display and consumption pattern that was expected of other rich men." Perhaps most important the sannyāsīs had actual if not legal access to the often sizable wealth of the monasteries whose income, I would add to Cohn's remarks, came in large part from tax free land revenues. For their trading activities the sannyāsīs had the additional advantage of what Cohn calls a "ready-made trading network" in the all-India monastic organization of the Dasnāmīs and in the annual pilgrimages on which many sannyāsīs apparently combined business and piety.[59]

Although the resident sannyāsī money lenders and traders were not themselves armed nāgās, they seem to have used these sannyāsī warriors to enforce payment of their loans from zamindars and others who were increasingly caught in the financial squeeze provoked by the depopulation stemming from the great famine of 1770 and the East India Company's insatiable demands for more revenue. Not unexpectedly the zamindars often appealed to the British authorities to cancel their debts in the same way that they pleaded for exemption from taxes because of the "contributions" annually demanded by the Madārīs. Rather than lessen their own revenue demands the British naturally tended to side with the zamindars and cancelled or readjusted their debts to the sannyāsīs.[60]

The animosities built up between the British and both the Madārīs and the Dasnāmīs eventually seem to have caused the fakirs and sannyāsīs to join together to resist the new order. On occasion they allied themselves with rebellious zamindars who saw themselves falling irremediably behind in their tax payments to the British authorities who threatened to auction off their traditional rights to the highest bidder and throw them in jail. In 1777 Majnū Shāh and a group of nāgās fought against each other in Bogra District. A similar encounter occured in Mymensingh District in 1782 and another again in Bogra District in 1786. In this same year, however, the Collector of Rangpur complained to the Committee of Revenue that "a party of Sunnyassies joined by a body of Mussalman Faqueers amounting to about 700 passed through part of this district and . . . laid several places under contribution . . ." similar combination of forces is mentioned in a report from Mymensingh in 1789.[61]

Most noteworthy in this connection is a deposition taken from a Dasnāmī nāgā in 1794 who was then a member of one of the bands of Madārī fakirs. According to his testimony there were in the band at that time: "above one thousand people, of which number there are four hundred Mussulman Fakeers and one hundred Hindoo

[57] On the Cooch Behar disputes and the sannyāsīs, see *ibid.*, pp. 76-82, and also N. B. Roy, "Nāgā Sannyāsī Ganeshgeer and the Kuchbihar Disturbance of 1787," *Jadunath Sarkar Commemoration Volume*, pp. 275-80.

[58] J. M. Ghosh, *The Sannyāsīs in Mymensingh*; B. S. Cohn, "The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Upper India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, I, No. 4 (1964), 175-82; D. H. A. Kolff, "Sannyasi Trader-Soldiers," *ibid.*, VIII (1971), 213-20.

[59] Cohn, pp. 180-81.

[60] See Ghosh, *Sannyasi and Fakir . . .*, pp. 138-60.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 74, 84, 94.

Sonassies, four hundred sepoys, twenty Byragies and the rest are people of different descriptions."[62] Evidently by this date the original character of the groups of Madārī fakirs had changed from that of religious pilgrims to social bandits whose activities did partake somewhat of the character of a rebellion. By this time, however, it had no chance of success and what might have become a sannyāsī-fakir led rebellion was soon dissipated both by the superior force of the Company government and the gradual return to prosperity of the countryside.

Eventually the Madārīs returned full circle to their peaceful pursuits while the various akhāṛās of warrior ascetics among the Dasnāmīs and Vaiṣṇavas deteriorated and eventually lost all except ceremonial functions. Even their recent resurgence in the anti-cow slaughter campaign has a doomed, anachronistic flavor. Neither the modern, centralized state established by the British nor the new independent India has had either need or desire for their services.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 112.